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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 9, 1961

MEMORANDUM OF MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT

(Tuesday, January 3 at 9:30 a.m.)

PRESENT: Secretary Herter, Secretary Merchant, Mr. Mann, Mr. Willauer, Secretary Gates, Secretary Douglas, General Lemnitzer, Mr. Dulles, Mr. Bissell, Mr. Barnes, Secretary Anderson, General Goodpaster and Gordon Gray

The President opened the meeting by saying that he had no immediate or urgent reason for the meeting but that he was constantly bombarded by people outside of government as to the situation in Cuba and he had called this group together to check up again on the situation and to make sure he had full information on the latest developments as well as current planning.

Mr. Herter observed that there was one immediate problem and that was our reaction to the Castro speech demanding that we cut down our official representatives in Cuba to 11 people. The Charge d'Affairs in Cuba suggested that there were two possible courses. One would be to break off diplomatic relations and other would be to begin immediately to develop the list of those who would be left behind as part of the eleven. The Charge had pointed out that the safety of American citizens in Cuba is controlling and the Charge recommended the first course of action.

In response to a question from the President, Mr. Mann said there were two to three thousand Americans in Cuba; some of them, however, would not come out even upon the urging of the government.

The President then wondered how we would get information about what is going on in Cuba if we have no diplomatic representation. Mr. Dulles responded that we can maintain some communications. Mr. Bissell amplified this observation by pointing out that there are arrangements made for a net of ten operators for "stay behind" but that this facility has not yet been used for communications. It is manned by Cubans and scattered throughout the island. He wished to point out it would be limited in volume, clandestine in nature, and not highly reliable.

The President said that if the Cubans started rounding up and shooting Americans we would then of course go in with our own forces but wondered how we would know that this was the case. He said it would be relatively easy to take them in groups of twenty to the hills and shoot them without any general public knowledge.

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Mr. Mann said the State Department had been thinking about the chief diplomatic representative from Switzerland as one who might take over our interests. He indicated that the Swiss had been sounded out some time ago and that we considered him a good man. Mr. Willauer added that we would know generally what is going on through other embassies and somewhat through the press. Mr. Dulles added that we had close relationships with.....

The President said that he assumed that all Americans are registered with the Embassy. Mr. Willauer said that we were not quite sure about this.

The President then said the U. S. should not tolerate being kicked around. For example, Castro did not call upon other countries to reduce their diplomatic representation.

Mr. Herter then read from a cable from the Attache setting forth his views.

Mr. Merchant interposed to say that we might consider waiting for 24 hours. There would be an item on the United Nations Security Council agenda the next morning and no doubt Cuba will insult us in full measure. Perhaps we should break off diplomatic relations following this Council meeting. This would have the added advantage of giving time for preparation of files in Cuba and arranging transportation.

Mr. Dulles said he wished to point out that a break in relations would somewhat impede the operations of his Agency as very helpful use has been made of.....

The President then asked why don't we tell the Charge that we will break off relations after the attack in the United Nations. Mr. Gates asked to be permitted to present a contrary view and asked why we didn't break in advance of the United Nations meeting. The President observed that we are used to being called names in the United Nations but acknowledged that we might be accused of breaking relations out of pique, and because they may have found a new name to call us. Mr. Herter said that we have some reason to believe that the Cubans are planning to surface a forged document which will purport to support the Castro charge that we are preparing an invasion by the 18th of January. In any event, he said that it would not be necessary for us to answer the charges in the United Nations.

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At this point Mr. Gray said he would like to return to Mr. Gates' question. It seemed to Mr. Gray that our posture both at home and abroad would be better if we broke relationships on the basis of the Castro demand and not wait until we were attacked in the United Nations. The President said that no one could be sure which would be the best course from that point of view, but felt that we might give the Charge 12 hours' notice and then announce the break before the meeting at the United Nations. He wondered whether this procedure would give credence to the charge of aggressive intentions on the part of the United States. The President said that we have to be aware that we have the many ignorant African nations now in the United Nations and he wondered what the act of severing relationships would do in giving credibility in their minds to the Castro charge.

The President said that he was quite sure that the decision should be made to break relationships and the only question is timing. It would seem to him that any American who wanted to leave Cuba would already be out of Cuba.

Mr. Anderson then said that he would like to make some observations. He wondered how long we really thought that Castro would remain in power. He feels that if we break relations and Castro lasts as long as another year, things would go badly to pieces. He pointed out that Venezuela is broke, and the Argentine is just holding on. Investment will come to a halt in other countries in Latin America and this would mean taking up the slack by Government spending. If we break relations and let this man survive for a year Mr. Anderson felt that we might expect the prospect of all of Latin America going down the drain. Mr. Anderson did not wish to minimize the problems but he felt if there is a choice it should be to get rid of Castro.

The President said that he had had it reported to him from Mr. Pawley that the governments of Peru and Argentina say that we should go ahead on that basis. The President said that he had a few days ago asked Mr. Merchant about the general attitudes of the other governments but supposed that there had not been enough time to get anything definitive. He said that he would move against Castro before the 20th if we were provided a really good excuse by Castro. Failing that, he said, perhaps we could think of manufacturing something that would be generally acceptable.

Mr. Gates reported briefly on his conversation with Mr. Pawley and the President said that he is not now suspect because of any investments. He had disposed of all of them as relate to Latin America.

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The President said he agrees that this thing has run along about as long as we can take it. However, he recalled the earlier hope that we could move against Trujillo and Castro simultaneously.

Mr. Mann said that we cannot expect within the next six months any really effective action from Latin America on their own initiative. However, they all expect us to do something. The President said that this was true but pointed out the risk of our breaking up the OAS and putting it in Communist hands.

Mr. Mann then said that we must recognize that it takes time to do these things. That is to say, break relationships, recognition of another government and then get other Latin Americans to come with us. This was said in response to a suggestion that perhaps we should now recognize a government in exile. Mr. Dulles said if we could recognize another group we would not have to act in such a covert manner in permitting the arming and training of these groups and other countries could rally to our banner. Mr. Herter pointed out that Peru which has just severed relationships is the sixth Latin American country to do so. Mr. Mann pointed out that Mexico will probably oppose anything we do.

Mr. Herter said there is another immediate problem. If we do break relationships what do we do about the new Administration. Shall we advise the President-elect? The President said that we should advise him through Secretary-designate Rusk. We should tell Mr. Rusk that we have decided to take this course. Upon response to a question, Mr. Dulles said that Mr. Rusk had not been fully briefed and in detail on the Planning with respect to Cuba. The President said that this should be done immediately.

The President again came back to the matter of timing in the break of relationships. He said the question is only when and how; that he is sure we must do it. He wanted the State Department to ponder this question.

At this point, Mr. Gray referred to the meeting that the 5412 Group had had with Lt. Colonel Eagen and the encouraging report of the caliber and motivation of the group in training. Mr. Merchant agreed that this was very encouraging. Mr. Gray said that Col. Eagen had described the trainees as the best Army in Latin America and General Lemnitzer agreed pointing out however some of the problems involving military equipment.

The President then turned to the question of public opinion in Cuba. Mr. Dulles said that the white collar people were against Castro but the peasants and workers were still largely for him; however, reliable reports indicated that the trend is against Castro. On the other hand he pointed out that the militia is being strengthened. He reported that the latest estimate is that time is running against us because of this improvement in the militia.

Mr. Dulles went on to say that a desirable timing for any movement by the trained refugees would probably be early March but depends in part upon the expected follow-up. He wondered whether we should not consider the question of whether we can recognize another government quite soon if we do break relationships with Cuba.

The President agreed with Mr. Willauer that we do not know whom we should recognize. If we should time our recognition with any movement then we could send the recognized group ashore in the first boat.

At this point Mr. Mann said that he had further amplification with respect to the President's question about public opinion. He felt that the support for Castro had gone down from approximately 95% to about 25 to 33%. He thought that with the 200,000 militia and army, Castro can count on a hard core of 20%. Also, it is believed that he can count on 20,000 out of the 200,000 militia to fight. He believes that it would be necessary to back up any invasion force with U. S. forces.

Mr. Herter observed that as a result of study by the State Department lawyers, he could say that if we break relations with Cuba this would have no effect on the Guantanamo treaty. Perhaps, he said, we should stage an "attack" on Guantanamo.

Mr. Dulles said that he would like to discuss a problem which was not a new one. That is how far we will go in using American territory in training. If we are to enlarge the force substantially and to infiltrate successfully we will need to use American soil for training as well as staging.

The President then said he wanted to inquire about the attitude of the other countries in Latin America with respect to training on their soil. Mr. Dulles replied that we are now working with Samozza but we have to be very careful about using the soil of dictators.

Mr. Gates suggested that perhaps we could decentralize trainees throughout American bases. This would be difficult to do administratively but he thought it could be done. By that he meant put 20 here and 20 there. The President pointed out that we must make specific arrangements in such a case to enlist personnel. Mr. Gates acknowledged that this of course would produce a lot of red tape.

Mr. Bissell expressed the view that we should train these people as a unit at least a month before their use. We can go up to 650 in Guatemala. There are 80 already in Panama for infiltration as quickly as possible and they are mostly at a secluded training area. We can physically put three to four hundred there but the political liabilities are almost the same as in the United States. If we go to a second battalion we would have need of other soil or new construction. He pointed out that there is a time limit involved. Ydigoras has indicated that we should not

keep these people in Guatemala beyond the 1st of March. Further, people who are training these individuals think morale will suffer dangerously if action is not taken by early March.

Mr. Willauer pointed out that we have a time problem with the OAS and that the only present alternative would be the use of American soil. Mr. Bissell observed that there is wide recognition that there is a Cuban opposition receiving covert support from the United States.

The President then said it seemed to him that we had only two reasonable alternative courses of action: (1) Supporting Cubans to go in March or (2) to abandon the operation.

He said that when we turn over responsibility on the 20th our successors should continue to improve and intensify the training and undertake planning when the Cubans are themselves properly organized. It seemed to the President that we might consider several methods with respect to training. (1) Put more in Panama (2) Put more in Nacaragua. (3) Put some at such places as Fort Benning, enlisting them in Army units. (4) Take care of some number as refugees.

The President then summarized from his point of view: (1) The main question today is when we say we will break. Personally he is now leaning toward doing it today. (Mr. Herter said in this event he would like to telephone the Charge d'Affairs concerning the safety of Americans and Ambassador Wadsworth to find out whether this would unacceptably make more difficult his task at the United Nations.) (2) The quicker we do it the more tempted Castro might be to actually attack Guantanamo. (3) In the meantime do as much as we can and quickly about Trujillo. (4) See how these splendidly trained 500 individuals can do anything useful, and to expand the backup for them. (5) Be concerned about broad support for the revolution. We should permit the Cubans to expand the forces already planned and then find ways to give arms to broader groups.

The President asked whether we were using propaganda pamphlets. Mr. Dulles replied that we were and also were using more local sabotage.

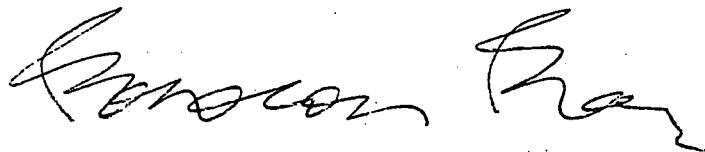
Mr. Gates then returned to the question of recognition. He asked if we were talking about March do we not soon have to select those whom we will recognize. The President repeated his earlier expressed view that there are now too many candidates for the government in exile and we might have to recognize those who go in the first boat. Mr. Gates argued that we should pick one man soon as a rallying point. Mr. Dulles joined in this thought. Mr. Willauer said that that will be fine when we find the right man but we have not yet found him. The President said he was prepared to recognize in a great hurry the man whenever we do find him.

Mr. Willauer said that we should consider the possibility of infiltrating the man in one of the teams. If we could keep him alive we could have the man to recognize right on the ground. Mr. Bissell replied that we are planning along this line. In response to a question from the President, Mr. Dulles said this would be in the Escambray Mountains. Mr. Bissell suggested that we are also considering Pinar del Rio. (At this point Mr. Barnes showed the President a map showing the location of various rebel groups.)

The President then said that we should pay serious attention to getting recoilless rifles in quickly.

The President then said again to summarize his views: (1) He wants to know when we should announce a break in relationships. (2) What are the feasible means of helping to mobilize a stronger invasion force so that a failure in the first effort would not wipe out the whole project. (3) On the diplomatic side, we must know the other countries who will support us. We should let Betancourt know we will do everything we can to support him. (Mr. Mann pointed out that the Venezuelan government would be glad to invade the Dominican Republic simultaneously. This would spread out and strengthen the moral base of our actions. He would of course want some help from us.) (4) USIA should be instructed to link Castro and Trujillo. This may help in Colombia and Venezuela. (Mr. Dulles replied that we are using Swan Island for attacking Trujillo as well as Castro.) The President said that this was insufficient; that we should always link the two and perhaps the OCB should make certain that all agencies were doing this.

The President closed the meeting by saying that he would rely on Mr. Herter, after consultation with Ambassador Wadsworth and the Charge, to recommend the timing with respect to the break in relationships and also what, if anything, the President himself should say publicly.



Gordon Gray  
Special Assistant to the President